

Story 1983 (1969 Tape 3)

Narrator: Müslim Yarar

Location: Aliçlık village, Bayburt kaza, Gümüşhane Province. (Since the time this tale was taped, Bayburt became the capital city of a new province of that same name.)

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Collected by Dr. Saim Sakaoğlu

Three Sons, Three Daughters, and a Father's Deathbed Wish¹

Once there was a padishah who had three sons and three daughters. One day in his old age he grew ill and was confined to his bed. He called his three sons to him and said to them, "When I die, I want you to take good care of your sisters. Allow each of them to marry the first suitor who comes to you and asks for her hand." A short while later the padishah died.

Early one morning the people in the palace were awakened by a loud knocking on their front door. It was a giant who was knocking. The oldest son opened the door and asked, "What do you want?"

The giant answered, "I have come to ask for the hand of your oldest sister in marriage."

¹The plotline of this tale is sometimes obstructed by the excessive number of elements included by the narrator.

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The oldest son slammed the door shut in the giant's face without saying a single word. But the giant continued to knock on the door. This time the middle brother went to the door and asked the giant, "What do you want?"

The giant answered, "I have come to ask for the hand of your oldest sister in marriage."

The middle brother also slammed the door without saying a word. Still the giant continued knocking on the door. Finally the youngest brother went to the door and asked the giant, "What do you want?"

"I have come to ask for the hand of your oldest sister in marriage." The youngest son granted this request, and so the giant took the oldest sister and left.

The second day began with the same loud knocking on the front door. When the oldest son opened the door, he found there a seven-headed giant. "What do you want?" he asked the seven-headed giant.

"I have come to ask for the hand of your middle sister in marriage."

The oldest brother said nothing but answered the request of the seven-headed giant by slamming the door in his face. The middle brother responded in the same way to the giant's request. But when the

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youngest son went to the door, he said, "I promised my father that I would give my sister to the first suitor who asked for her hand. You are the first suitor, and so she is yours. Take her." The seven-headed giant left the palace with the middle daughter of the late padishah.

Early on the third day there was once again a knocking on the front door. When the oldest brother opened the door, he found a midget on the doorstep. "What do you want?" he asked the little man.

"I have come to ask for the hand of your youngest sister in marriage."

"You cannot have her," answered the oldest brother, and he shut the door. When the middle brother went to the door, he said the same thing and also closed the door. However, the youngest brother, who then went to the door, accepted the request of the midget.

But the two older brothers objected, saying to the youngest, "You have given away our oldest and middle sisters to unacceptable suitors, but we shall not permit you to give our youngest sister to a midget."

The youngest brother said, "We promised our father to give our sisters to the first suitors who asked for them. That is why I insist upon giving our youngest sister to this man." The midget then took the girl and departed.

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By now the two older brothers were angry at the youngest brother. They planned between themselves to take all the gold in the palace and move to some other place. When the youngest brother discovered what they were going to do, he gathered all of the gold quickly and hid it beneath a bridge. He intended to sleep there beneath the bridge that night, but around midnight he was awakened by a noise, and then he saw his brothers coming along. Jumping up to meet them, he startled them. "Don't be afraid," he said. "It is only I who have come to join you in your travels." The older brothers were not pleased by that idea, but they finally agreed to let him accompany them.

The three of them walked all the rest of that night and all of the following day. Towards evening they came to a large empty house. They entered that house, where they ate and drank some of their supplies. But the younger brother was concerned about their position. He said, "Somebody must own this house, and that owner may return later tonight. Let us be cautious and keep watch!"

The older brothers laughed and said, "Who would own such a deserted house in such a remote place?" They then fell asleep, but the youngest brother forced himself to stay awake.

In the middle of the night a seven-headed giant and his witch wife entered the house. Through the use of magic, the witch detected that the brothers were also in the house, and through her magic she

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discovered their names. To the oldest brother she called, "Ahmak [sic], are you awake?" There was no sound. Then she called to the middle brother, "Çakmak, are you awake?" Still there was no sound. Then she called to the youngest brother, "Emiş, are you awake?"

"Yes," answered the youngest brother.

"My son," said the witch, "why are you not sleeping?"

"At home my mother always fixed me a hot dessert before I went to bed, and then I would go to sleep."

The old witch fixed a hot dessert and gave it to the boy. After awhile she called to the brothers again. "Ahmak, are you awake?" There was no answer. "Çakmak, are you awake?" Again there was no answer. Then she called, "Emiş, are you awake?"

"Yes."

"My son, why are you still awake?" But the youngest son was ready for her this time. He leaped upon her and cut off her head with his sword. Then he went to where he could hear the seven-headed giant snoring, and he killed him too. He then hid the two bodies in another part of the house.

In the morning the three brothers arose, and the youngest fixed breakfast. They then set forth again and traveled until that evening. Again they entered an empty house, even though the youngest brother

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again warned them of the danger in doing so. The older brothers laughed and said, "You always lie about such matters. Nothing happened to us last night. Why should anything happen to us tonight?"

But the youngest brother lay awake all night, and just before dawn a six-headed giant entered the house. The youngest brother killed that giant and hid his body. By then it was time for him to make breakfast, but the fire on the hearth had gone out. He saw a fire burning in the distance and he went toward it. He found a seven-layered cauldron near the fire. He scooped up some hot coals in that cauldron and started back with it, but the giants in the camp who owned that cauldron stopped him and said, "You must be a very strong man to carry that cauldron. We need your help here."

"I cannot stay here to help you, for there are other things that I have to do," answered the youngest brother.

"No, we shall not let you leave until you have helped us. We have been fighting for seven years to get the padishah's daughter as bride for one of our younger giants, but our efforts have failed. We need your help to get that girl."

The youngest brother was angry at the giants for forcing him to remain there to help them, but he pretended that he would help them. "Very well," he said, "I shall help you." That evening as they were all walking to attack the padishah's palace in the dark, the

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youngest brother said to the giants, "I have a plan for the way we should proceed after we reach the palace. I shall enter the palace first and guard the door so that no one can prevent you from entering. Then I shall call your names one by one, and each of you should enter the door alone after I have called your name." The giants all agreed to this.

When they reached the palace, the youngest brother entered first. Then he called the name of a giant, and when that giant stuck his head through the doorway, the young man cut it off with his sword. Then he called a second giant and cut off his head in the same way. Continuing this procedure, he soon killed all of the giants.

He then crept very quietly through the palace until he found the room of the sleeping princess, but when he found it, he discovered that it contained three princesses, not just one. At the head of each bed was a goblet of sherbet. The youngest son drank the first goblet of sherbet and said, "I drink this goblet for my oldest brother." When he drank the second goblet of sherbet, he said, "I drink this one for my middle brother." And when he drank the third, he said, "I drink this one for myself." Before leaving the room, he also cut a small piece from the collar of each girl's robe.

In the morning the padishah was astounded to find the bodies of the giants near the door. He was also surprised that someone other than his daughters had drunk the three goblets of sherbet standing in

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his daughters' room and had cut a small piece of cloth from the collar of each girl's robe.² He said, "We must discover who this brave person is. I am willing to give him whatever he wishes." He called into his presence all of the able-bodied men in the city and questioned them about the slaying of the giants. All of them denied having carried out that brave deed. By then the older brothers of Emiř had arrived in that city, and the padishah also questioned them but decided that neither of them was the hero he was seeking. However, when the youngest brother was brought before the padishah and questioned, he acknowledged at once that he was responsible for what had happened.

He said, "Yes, I am the one for whom you are looking. I left my signature in your daughters' room. After killing the giants, I drank

²There is in Turkish folklore a good bit of both figurative language and symbolic language. Certain objects in certain positions have, under certain circumstances, symbolic meaning. This is especially true in the ritual of courtship. Since troths are often plighted by the drinking of sherbet (a cold fruit drink in the Middle East and not the icy confection it often is elsewhere), the three goblets of sherbet in the girls' room may be more than an indifferent beverage. Symbolic language is not restricted to folklore in Turkey but is sometimes a medium of communication in real life. In 1718 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (wife of the English ambassador in Istanbul) sent to a friend back home an account of Turkish "love letters" made up of specially arranged objects that included a pearl, various flowers, spices, fruits, and a golden thread. See her Letters (London, 1906), pp. 158-161.

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the three goblets of sherbet standing in your daughters' room, and I cut a small piece of cloth from the collar of each girl's robe."

The padishah said, "Well done, my son! You have removed from this earth our greatest enemies. In gratitude for this, I shall give my oldest daughter to your brother Ahmak and my middle daughter to your brother Çakmak. My youngest daughter will be yours." The ruler then arranged for a great wedding celebration, at the end of which the three brothers were married to his three daughters.

After the three brothers had lived in the palace for some time with their brides, the youngest brother said to the ruler, "Your Majesty, our father was also a padishah, and now we should like to have your permission to return to our own country with our wives."

The padishah responded, "It is quite right that you should go," and he gave them his daughters' belongings³ as well as many expensive gifts from himself. He then gave them a warning. He said, "On the way back to your own land, you will probably pass a demonic idolator. Have nothing whatsoever to do with that person, for he is a very dangerous man. I have had him restricted to that place for years by means of a spell cast by a magician. If any human being touches

³Traditionally Turkish brides take with them into marriage a dowry. Turkish girls often begin accumulating a trousseau at a tender age, and by the time they are married, they may have several trunks full of clothing, linens, and small household items.

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him, the spell will be broken, and then that demonic idolator may do you great harm, including the abduction of my daughters.”

After the three brothers had traveled for a way, they did indeed come across the demonic idolator about whom they had been warned. The idolator begged the oldest brother, “Come here and touch me,” but Ahmak avoided him. The middle brother also refused to go near him.

When the demonic idolator appealed to the youngest brother to touch him, Emiş said, “I have killed many giants. Why should I be afraid of any human being?”

But his wife pleaded with him, “Please, my husband, do not have anything to do with this person. My father has kept him here under a spell for years. He has demonic powers. If you should touch him, he might turn you into stone or make you disappear, and then he would abduct me.”

But the youngest brother repeated, “I am not afraid of him,” and laid his hand upon the arm of the demonic idolator. Immediately a great cloud of smoke shot upward and a very loud noise, like thunder, was heard. When the air had cleared, the bride saw that her husband had been reduced to nothing but a pile of bones.

The bride then appealed to the idolator, saying, “This young man has been very helpful to my family. Please permit me to take his bones.” Since the idolator made no objection, the bride gathered her

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husband's bones in a bag. She then placed the bag upon the back of her husband's horse and turned the horse loose.

That horse galloped and galloped until it reached the home of the husband's oldest sister. When the sister saw the horse approaching, she said, "That looks like the horse of my youngest brother. Let me take a closer look at it." When she reached the horse, she recognized her brother's bones in the bag on the animal's back. She burst into tears and continued crying for days until she had become blind.⁴

The blind wife was led to the padishah of giants, whom she asked for help. He ignored her completely, but a lame giant took pity on her. He said, "We must get the tongues of two birds of a certain species to cure your blindness and to restore your brother." After he had found two birds of that type, he killed them and removed their tongues. Taking them to the blind bride, he said, "Place one of these tongues on each of your eyelids." After she had done this, her sight was restored. The lame giant then said, "Now place those tongues on your brother's bones." As soon as she did that, the youngest brother was restored to his original form.

⁴There is a folk belief (not restricted to Turkish culture) that excessive weeping can cause blindness.

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The first words spoken by the recovered youngest brother were, "I must go at once and try to rescue my wife, even if the effort costs me my life!"

The lame giant said, "Do not waste your time trying to do that. There is no way to reach whatever distant place that devil of a man may have taken your wife."

Ignoring this advice, the youngest son jumped on his horse and went in search of his stolen wife. Along his way he came upon a young woman who was weeping. He called to her, asking, "Lady, why are you crying?"

The young woman answered, "I am crying because I miss my family." But when she took a closer look at the traveler, she said, "It is difficult for me to believe what I am seeing, for you look very much like my youngest brother!"

"How could you recognize your brother for certain if you were really to see him?"

"My brother has a birthmark, shaped like the letter B, on the right side of his chest."

"I have that birthmark!" he said, opening his shirt and revealing his chest. They then embraced each other and went to her nearby home. There they talked all the rest of that day.

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When evening approached, Emiř's middle sister said, "You must leave now. My giant husband will soon come home, and if he sees you here, he may kill you." Emiř did not leave, but hid himself behind the door.

When the giant arrived home, he found that his wife seemed to be very upset about something. "O daughter of a padishah, what is the matter with you? Why are you so sad?"

She replied, "How can I be happy? I am held here like a prisoner. I am not permitted to go and visit my brothers."

The giant replied, "Do not even mention your oldest or your middle brother to me! I shall never allow you to visit them or allow them to come here to visit you. If they ever come here, I shall kill them at once!"

"But what about my youngest brother?"

"He will always be welcome in my house."

Looking more cheerful now, the wife said, "Well, he is actually here right now." As soon as she said that, the youngest brother came out of hiding and greeted his brother-in-law.

The youngest brother spent two or three days there, and while he was talking with his brother-in-law, he told him what had happened. The giant then called together several of his giant friends and asked them if they knew where the demonic idolator might now be found.

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One of his friends said, “While I was out seeking food for my family, I saw the cursed idolator flying fast as the wind, and when he disappeared from my view, he was headed out over the ocean.”

Hearing that, the youngest brother said, “Then I must cross that ocean in search of him!”

But his brother-in-law said, “If he was flying as fast as that, he must have been riding his sea horse,⁵ and you will not be able to overtake him unless you too have a sea horse. We must find such a special horse for you to ride.” With the aid of the giants, the youngest son captured a sea horse and ordered it to take him to the place where the demonic idolator was holding his wife captive.

His horse flew swiftly as the wind and after several hours reached the palace of the demon idolator on a distant island. The youngest son entered the palace and found his wife there alone. Although she was pleased to see him, she was also alarmed. “You should not have come here,” she said. “That dangerous man will be back in three hours, and if he finds you here, he will kill you!” The

⁵From ancient times Turkish folklore has included accounts of horses that live underwater—in lakes, rivers, oceans. A “sea horse” is an actual equine creature and not the tiny fish of the Syngnathidae family referred to as “sea horse” because of the shape of its head and neck. These preternatural horses have the ability to fly, to speak human language, and to offer wise counsel. Their prescience makes them capable of warning their owners of pitfalls and the plots of sinister enemies.

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young man placed his wife behind him on his magic horse and departed.

When the demonic idolator arrived at his palace, he found that his captive was not there. Going to the stable, he asked his horse, "Where is the padishah's daughter?"

The horse said, "While you were gone, her husband came and took her away. They have now been gone for almost three hours."

The idolator asked his horse, "Shall we search for them before dinner or after dinner?"

"Whenever you wish," replied the horse. Hearing that, the evil man jumped upon his horse and started searching immediately for the youngest brother and the daughter of the padishah.

In the meantime, the married couple had reached the mainland, where the horse descended so that they could all rest for awhile. They came to a place along the seashore where an old female horse lived. They quickly discovered that she was a sea horse, and none other than the mother of their own sea horse. She was very pleased to see her youngest son again. After the two sea horses had talked with each other for awhile, the youngest son spoke to the older horse. He said, "We are being pursued by a demonic idolator. If he overtakes us, he will kill both me and my wife. Please give us permission to leave so that we

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may continue our flight.” That permission was given at once, and the young couple mounted their horse and left.

While the mother horse was still thinking about the plight of her youngest son, the demonic idolator came along that same route. When the mother looked at the horse he was riding, she recognized at once that it was one of her older sons. Speaking to him in the language of sea horses, she said, “Your rider is a thoroughly evil man. Rise slightly into the air and shake him off your back so that when his body strikes the earth it will be broken into pieces no larger than my ear.” The sea horse did what his mother had ordered, and the demonic idolator was totally destroyed. The mother herself then overtook the fleeing couple so that she could give an order to her youngest son too. “You must be a devoted servant of your young owner. Protect him from all dangers for the rest of his life.”

The youngest son then took his wife to the palace where he had been born. There they had another wedding celebration, after which they lived very happily together.